

# **Response to “South Asia Studies Faculty Review” Suggested Edits for IQC meeting of Nov. 19**

**UBEROI FOUNDATION  
INSTITUTE FOR CURRICULUM ADVANCEMENT**

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(page and line numbers are as given in the Faculty Review. We also note their edits do not encompass the list of recommended IQC edits released prior to the meeting)



**Introduction:** We are hastily responding to the last-minute submission by the “South Asia Studies Faculty” to the Framework Narrative review process. Indeed, it would have been much preferred that their concerns appeared earlier in this process, which started in 2009. Given the time constraints, we are responding mainly to the specific edits they propose and not to their extensive general suggestions.

We do take issue, however, with two broad assertions. First, that “Hinduism” is somehow an inappropriate term for the religion of ancient India. The word derives from Sindhu, not the more recent terms of Hind and al-Hind which are themselves derived from Sindhu. This is to us a transparent attack on the legitimacy of the Hindu religion, and contrary to the understanding of one billion Hindus worldwide.

Second, we greatly appreciate the recognition that the presentation of Indian history not be demeaning to any group of students. The SASF points out that “all cultures and civilizations known to history, including those of the West, have regimes of social hierarchy based on class, ethnicity, race, religion, or occupation.”

Logically, therefore, the faculty should have offered appropriate edits to the sections on Judaism, Christianity and Islam to describe *their* social hierarchies—in particular, their practice and religious sanction of slavery. But the faculty did not, and social hierarchy remains an area of discussion only for Hinduism. We therefore regard their attempts to thus demonize Hindu society by further emphasizing varna/jati unjustifiable and justly to be ignored.

A common theme throughout the document is “scholarly consensus.” We would point out that history is a matter of facts, not consensus, and all fields of knowledge have now-accepted theories once ridiculed by “scholarly consensus”—continental drift, DNA, black holes, quarks, the AC motor and so on. We have provided strong support from recognized scholars on our points about ancient Indian history. Yes, they are in a minority, but they are experts in their field and their opinions cannot be ignored.

The SASF document devotes a large number of pages to DNA research, though their concerns are not reflected in the actual suggested edits. We have provided separately an article by Michel Danino, who has earlier given a submission to the Commission, “Genetics and the Aryan Issue,” which appeared in *The History of Ancient India*, Vol. 3, edited by Dilip K Chakrabarti and Makkhan Lal. In his Nov. 19 comments to the commission, he states, “[The paper] misrepresents the current state of genetic research, the vast majority of which has rejected the possibility of a major addition to India’s gene pool.”

**Next we will extract and address as best we can the proposals made in the SASF document.**

**1. Faculty Review proposal:** We recommend changing the Title of this Section to “The Early Civilizations of South Asia.” At several other places in the text, we also recommend substituting South Asia for “Ancient India” or “India” (see pp. 190, 192, 198-200, 208-210, 230)

**Uberoi Response:** *The term South Asia includes modern-day Pakistan, Bangladesh, India,*



Nepal and Sri Lanka. The narrative does not deal with Nepal or Sri Lanka, but with the area known historically as India for thousands of years. At another point they suggest the name India should only be used post 1947. If one wanted to be precise, the area under discussion is "undivided India," but that cumbersome term is not commonly used. In his comments submitted to the commission Nov. 19, Danino states on this point: "This is quite contrary to the scholarly practice and convention of using the term "India" to designate the Indian subcontinent all the way to 1947. All Indological studies of the 19th and 20th centuries did so, and with good reason. The intention to erase the special identity of India's classical civilization is transparent."

**2. Faculty Review proposal:** We recommend changing "Harappa Civilization" to "Indus Valley Civilization"

**Uberoi Response:** On this point, Dr. Chakrabarti of Cambridge (who has also submitted comments to the commission), states, "The name is Indus Civilization or Harappan Civilization. It is not Indus Valley Civilization because the civilization has been found far outside the Indus valley. The name IVC carries a wrong impression that the civilization is limited to the Indus valley alone."

**3. Faculty Review proposal:** dropping reference to the Saraswati/Sarasvati River at p. 209 where it is superfluous and on p. 210

**Uberoi Response:** This is an attempt to remove one of the key pieces of evidence for a relationship between the Vedic people and the Indus-Saraswati Civilization, which the acknowledge as being referenced in the Rig Veda. Those references are not so easily dismissed, as has been shown in the work of Ashok Adlujkar previously referenced by us. Danino states in response to this suggestion, "The discussion of the Sarasvati river is replete with gross misrepresentations and selective citations, omitting all the work done since 1855, when the river was first identified with the Ghaggar-Hakra—an identification which was accepted by generations of French, British and German Indologists, geographers and geologists, and later numerous archaeologists from Marc Aurel Stein (1917) to Mortimer Wheeler (1968), Raymond Allchin, Gregory Possehl, J.M. Kenoyer (all three in the 1990s and 2000s), and their many Indian colleagues." See Danino's paper which is being submitted separately, "Discovering the Sarasvati, from 1855 to 2014", which gives an honest picture of the current state of geological research on the river. Dr. Chakrabarti says in response, "The section on the Saraswati river is pathetic and aimed at suggesting that it did not exist. That it existed can be shown on the basis of old maps alone. The faculty cite Jayant Tripathi to suggest that the Saraswati was not a glacial river, whereas Sanjeev Gupta's research shows otherwise." All Indian historical tradition affirms the existence of the "lost" Saraswati River.

**4. Faculty Review proposal:** changing "Ganges" to "Ganga" (p. 210), ....by calling it "India's other great river system"

**Uberoi Response:** We agree and have made the same suggestion on Ganga and have no issue with "other great..."

**5. Faculty Review proposal:** p. 210, Lines 802-804: We recommend changing the following sentence since there is no clear linkage of Hinduism to IVC: "Some of the statues and figurines show features that are all present in modern Hinduism, such as a male figure that resembles



the Hindu God Shiva in meditating posture."

Replace with:

"Although not much is known about the religious practices and beliefs of the Indus Valley civilization, some form of mother goddess may have been worshipped."

**Uberoi Response:** *As with the Saraswati River, the attempt here is to eliminate one of the clearest pieces of hard evidence for the relationship of the Indus people to later Hinduism. The figure is just one of many (such as the symbol of the Siva Lingam) that relate to subsequent Hindu practice or belief, as shown by Dr. B.B. Lal in his submission to the IQC.*

**6. Faculty Review proposal:** p. 210, Line 808: We recommend deleting "deforestation" from the sentence below, as there is no evidence for this:

**Uberoi Response:** *no objection*

**7. Faculty Review proposal:** There is a shift here from Vedic culture Brahmanism to Hinduism that is unwarranted in this passage. .... We recommend deleting "Hinduism" from this passage, and substituting the word "Vedas" so that the question reads, "How did the religion of the Vedas..."

**Uberoi Response:** *In 2006, Dr. Michael Witzel of Harvard, Dr. James Heitzman of UC Davis and Dr. Stanley Wolpert of UCLA all agreed with Dr. Bajpai to eliminate the word Brahmanism in favor of early Hinduism, and the State Board of Education so ordered the textbooks to be changed. At this point in time, the religion of the country already included more than the Vedic tradition. We argue that the same analysis still stands, that the Orientalist term Brahmanism is not useful, as shown most recently in the work of Dr. Vishwa Adluri and referenced in our paper, "Teaching of Hinduism in the California State School System: Evaluation and Recommendations," which is with the Commission testimony.*

**8. Faculty Review proposal:** delete "but many important sages, such as Valmiki and Vyasa, were not Brahmins. (p. 211) since this information is incorrect (both were Brahmins).

**Uberoi Response:** *It is commonly understood that Valmiki and Vyasa were not brahmins by birth but later regarded as brahmins by virtue of their conduct. Other examples can be provided.*

**9. Faculty Review proposal:** We recommend changing "Telagu" to "Telegu" pg. 211, line 819

**Uberoi Response:** *No objection, though it is more commonly Telugu.*

**10. Faculty Review proposal:** We recommend changing this sentence, "Indian history then entered the Vedic period (ca. 1500-500 BCE), an era named for the Vedas, Sanskrit religious texts passed on for generations through a complex oral tradition.

Replace with:

"Ancient South Asia experienced a Vedic period (ca. 1500-500 BCE), named for the Vedas which were composed in Sanskrit. While Sanskrit texts, both religious and secular, continued to be produced in subsequent centuries, texts in Old Tamil also began to appear around 300 BCE, and Tamil literary production flourished during the Sangam period in South India. (ca.



300BCE- 300 CE). Sanskrit and Tamil texts passed on for generations through a complex oral tradition.

**Uberoi Response:** *Since the Vedic period is acknowledged as extending to 500 bce, this is not the correct place to insert the later Tamil Sangam period. This historically important Sangam period could be mentioned at the correct place in the chronology.*

**11. Faculty Review proposal:** This sentence is inaccurate, “Vedic teachings gradually built up a rich body of spiritual and moral teachings that formed the foundation of Hinduism as it is practiced today” and recommend it be changed to “Vedic teachings gradually built up a rich body of spiritual and moral teachings that form a key foundation of Hinduism as it is practiced today.”

**Uberoi Response:** *no objection*

**12. Faculty Review proposal:** p. 211 “The Hindu tradition is thus monistic, the idea of reality being a unitary whole.”

This is a broad generalization that is not applicable to many practices and beliefs regarded as part of Hinduism; it privileges certain advaita beliefs. The issue requires more clarification, but we suggest not making changes at the moment

**Uberoi Response:** *We agree that this statement is focused on advaita beliefs and have offered our own edit (#5) to correct it.*

**13. Faculty Review proposal:** This sentence is inaccurate and misleading: “Many of the central practices of Hinduism today, including home and temple worship, yoga and meditation, rites of passage (samskaras), festivals, pilgrimage, respect for saints and gurus, and, above all, a profound acceptance of religious diversity, developed over this period.”

There are clear differences between Vedism and what is generally referred to as Hinduism, contrary to the statement that the major components of Hinduism are “...easily discernible in the Vedic period...” We recommend deleting a “profound acceptance for religious diversity” from the above sentence as there was much internal conflict and persecution during the Vedic Period which lead to the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism.

**Uberoi Response:** *While there was occasional conflict motivated by religion, this was minor in comparison to the spirit of religious harmony found among Hindus, Jains and Buddhist of the time. Besides, Hindu philosophy clearly endorsed the acceptance of religious diversity (unlike some other religions), whether carried out in practice in every instance or not. They comment here on differences between what they call “Vedism” and Hinduism, but offer no edit on this point. The indigenous name of Hinduism is Sanatana Dharma, since Vedic times.*

**14. Faculty Review proposal:** line 857—We recommend changing “A person belonged to a particular Varna by his professional excellence and his good conduct, not by birth itself” to “A person belonged to a particular varna not just by his professional excellence and his good conduct, but mainly by birth.”

The ideal of caste included the idea that professional excellence and good conduct situated a member in that caste, but not necessarily in practice. At the core of varna ideology and its



representation in the Hindu religious texts is the idea of the four orders and the birth of a person into one of the orders. Because the varna order is based on the notion of “by birth,” it guarantees the superiority of the Brahmin. A Shudra or a Vaisya cannot be a Brahmin. This principle, birth into a varna, also guarantees notions of ritual purity and impurity.

**Uberoi Response:** *Here the authors are conflating varna, based on personal conduct, and jati, based on birth. As mentioned in our earlier submissions, the jatis cannot be consistently mapped to the varnas.*

*Elsewhere in their comments, they object to the removal of the term Dalit. This is a modern term which has no place in our textbook on ancient India, as it is anachronistic for the period under discussion. We would point out this term is not used by the Hindu Untouchable communities, and it has been forbidden to be used in court proceedings in India, as it is not the term in India's constitution. This word has been put forward by the Christians as part of their efforts to convert the Untouchable communities—even though those converts remain Untouchables in the Christian community and separated from the higher jatis both at church services and in burial grounds.*

**15. Faculty Review proposal:** Pg. 213: line 874-876—We recommend adding the part in italics to the end of the sentence, Today many Hindus, in India and in the United States, do not identify themselves explicitly as belonging to a caste, *but may do so implicitly.*”

**Uberoi Response:** *We do not know how the authors determined Hindus in the US and India identify “implicitly” with caste. In any case, the suggested statement is just one more example of negative information about caste which is not necessary. The youth who testified before the IQC said they did not even know what their jati was before they read about caste in their textbooks and asked their parents.*

**16. Faculty Review proposal:** Pg. 214: line 883-4---“fewer property rights than men.” We recommend changing *fewer* to *little* property rights when compared with men, akin to the other ancient kingdoms and societies.

**Uberoi Response:** *The attempt here seems to be, again, to put Indian society in the worst possible light as such statements are not made when discussing other societies. If, as they say, India was no different than everywhere else, then the same statement should be inserted for every other culture under discussion in the narrative.*

**17. Faculty Review proposal:** p. 214, line 874: eliminate end of sentence “which can make the “caste” label offensive.” This is irrelevant, and is not necessary for the meaning of the sentence.

**Uberoi Response:** *Why should it not be stated that the caste label is offensive? We are talking to sixth graders. The children testified to being taunted, “What caste are you?” so this is an entirely relevant and appropriate warning.*

**18. Faculty Review proposal:** p. 214, line 892: change “the correct moral decision” to “important moral decisions.” The moral quandaries of the *Ramayana* continue to be debated among Hindus in various versions of the *Ramayana*



**Uberoi Response:** *We agree this needs to be changed and made a similar suggestion in our own edits which was adopted in the IQC edits prepared for the Nov. 19 meeting.*

**19. Faculty Review proposal:** Pg. 214: line 893---Other versions of the *Ramayana* may include a more nuanced, critical evaluation of Rama's roles, and it may be helpful to introduce students to the different versions of the *Ramayana*.

**Uberoi Response:** *While a good idea, we doubt the teacher would have time to go into different versions of the Ramayana.*

**20. Faculty Review proposal:** Pg. 214 line 901- We recommend deleting "Hindu background" from this sentence, "Through the story of his life, his Hindu background, and his search for enlightenment, students may learn about his fundamental ideas: suffering, compassion, and mindfulness." The Buddha was a member of the Sakya clan; nothing called Hinduism existed at this moment in time

**Uberoi Response:** *What is the need for this edit? We see none. Certainly Buddha developed within the religious environment of his time, and why should it not be called Hinduism?*

**21. Faculty Review proposal:** Pg. 214 We recommend changing this sentence so that it does not appear as if Buddhism completely disappeared in India and was replaced by Hinduism, "Buddhism waned in India in the late first millennium CE as the result of a resurgence of Hindu tradition"  
Replace with, "Although Buddhism waned in the Indian subcontinent in the late first millennium CE as the result of a resurgence of Hindu tradition, vibrant Buddhist communities still thrive in India, Nepal, and Bhutan."

**Uberoi Response:** *The Buddhist community in India is very small, just 0.7% of the population today. We do not, therefore view the termed "waned" as incorrect.*

**22. Faculty Review proposal:** p. 215 line 905, In the sentence, "Buddhist monks, nuns, and merchants, however, carried their religion to Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Central Asia, China, and Southeast Asia" we recommend replacing "however," with "also."

**Uberoi Response:** *The attempt here seems to be the same as edit 21, which is to attribute an unrealistically large presence to Buddhism in India at this time.*

**23. Faculty Review proposal:** We recommend addition of an opening sentence for this section, something like this: "At the end of the Vedic period, about the sixth century BCE, there arose many who renounced family life and became wandering teachers of new philosophies of life. Two of the most successful were Siddhartha Gautama, called the Buddha ("the awakened one") and the Mahavira ("the great hero"). The religions they taught are Buddhism and Jainism. Buddhism spread very widely beyond South Asia, throughout Central, East and Southeast Asia.

**Uberoi Response:** *We have no particular objection to this edit except that it offers no mention of the Hindu context that these teachers arose in, implying instead that they unrealistically*



*emerged in a vacuum of religious belief and practice, when in fact they were very much in continuity with existing Hindu practice.*

**24. Faculty Review proposal:** We recommend adding something like this: Buddhism teaches that the path to liberation from the wheel of death and rebirth is through the suppression of selfish desires. It teaches that the world is impermanent, that the self is an illusion, and that suffering is rooted in the false belief in the self.

**Uberoi Response:** *No objection. It is certainly the case that the description of Buddhism is short; however we observe in the actual textbooks that in terms of religious belief and practice, Buddhism receives far more coverage than Hinduism, where the entire focus is on caste.*

**25. Faculty Review proposal:** We recommend for Jainism something like this: "Jainism promoted the idea of *ahimsa* (non- violence to all life), which was taken up by Buddhists and Hindus, especially in the form of vegetarianism.

**Uberoi Response:** *Ahimsa and the practice of vegetarianism are clearly present in Hinduism before this time. This needs to be noted.*

**26. Faculty Review proposal:** We recommend at least one sentence be written devoted to each of the three subjects: the Indus Valley (not Harappa) civilization, the Vedic period, and the Maurya Empire, giving examples of how each was connected with regions outside India.

**Uberoi Response:** *The idea is good, but no actual suggestion is made for us to comment on. We would note that after making a major point about "South Asia" instead of India, the authors themselves easily lapse back into the far more logical use of "India" in this and other suggestions.*

**27. Faculty Review proposal:** We recommend changing the sentence on Chandragupta Maurya to, "A period of prolonged military struggle between the republics and kingdoms of North India culminated in the victory of Chandragupta Maurya and the first unification of India in 321 BCE, comparable to the Warring States period in China and its first unification under the Qin slightly later."

**Uberoi Response:** *No objection, and note again the faculty's use of the term "India."*

**28. Faculty Review proposal:** Pg. 262, lines 709-10-We recommend deleting this sentence, "Even though India was not unified into one state, nor did its people belong to a single religion, the entire area was developing a cultural unity."

There was neither territorial, cultural, nor linguistic unity in South Asia at this time; Hinduism at this moment would have played little role in such a process in any case.

**Uberoi Response:** *Linguistic unity was there in the pan-India use of Sanskrit for roughly a thousand years from 300 ce to 1300 ce as the common language of the educated people of India (again used instead of "South Asia" in the faculty edit). All India was not a single state after the Mauryas, but there were very large states in both north and south India, such as the Gupta empire. Pilgrimage was a major factor in bringing about this unity at the time of the*



*Bhakti Movement, and very much a part of Hinduism.*

**29. Faculty Review proposal:** Pg. 264: lines 703-4-We recommend deleting this part of the sentence, "who had three aspects: Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the keeper, and Siva, the destroyer." This is inaccurate; much bhakti devotionism is in fact focused on Ram or Krishna as manifestations of the Lord.

**Uberoi Response:** *No objection to the deletion, but would recommend: Hinduism continued to evolve with the Bhakti movement, which emphasized personal expression of devotion to God, ~~who had three aspects: Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the keeper, and Siva, the destroyer,~~ most popularly in the form of Rama or Krishna as manifestations of the Lord.*

**30. Faculty Review proposal:** Pg. 264: line 709---We recommend adding a sentence to the following effect: The Bhakti movement also served as a critique of the power held by priestly elites.

**Uberoi Response:** *Unnecessary criticism of the Hindu priesthood. This is not an acceptable edit.*

**31. Faculty Review proposal:** p. 265 Replace "India" on lines 729 and 731 with "South Asia."

**Uberoi Response:** *Addressed earlier as inappropriate.*

**32. Faculty Review proposal:** Pg. 306, Lines 1543-1554 consider substituting this passage: Around 1520, Nanak (1469-1539), a religious thinker and poet of significant talent acquired a piece of land on the banks of the river Ravi, founded a new town named Kartarpur ("Creator's town") in the region called the Punjab, and presently split between India and Pakistan. There he gathered a group of families that did farming for sustenance. Over time, this community evolved into a world religion with twenty-five million adherents scattered around the globe. In his compositions, Nanak sang of God who brought the creation into being and oversees its activity with a great degree of concern. Nanak expected human beings to be in constant awareness of divine immanence around them, and as a result live a life of personal purity, hard work, and social productivity. As the Sikh community expanded they came into conflict with the Mughal rulers of the time, and this confrontation eventually resulted in the Sikhs establishing their own rule in the Punjab.

**Uberoi Response:** *We find this an excellent suggestion.*

**33. Faculty Review proposal:** p. 364, line 264, Change Hindu and Sikh to "South Asian (mostly Sikh)" in the sentence, "California also came to play an increasingly significant role in the national economy. The Gold Rush in California, the building of the transcontinental railroad, and agricultural labor in Hawaii and the mainland spurred Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, and Sikh immigration to the United States."

**Uberoi Response:** *We prefer this wording: "Indian (mostly Sikh)"*

**34. Faculty Review proposal:** pp. 436, 443, 444, and 447 we recommend changing "India" to South Asia. Most references to India before 1947 should be changed to "South Asia."



**Uberoi Response:** *Already addressed.*

**35. Faculty Review proposal:** 447, lines 533-37: We recommend changing these sentences, "Colonizers introduced new infrastructures, medicines, educational systems, and cultural norms. Print technology and more rapid transportation aided the growth of organized religion. These technological developments also facilitated the transformation of regional Indian religious traditions into a more unified Hinduism" to the following:

"Colonizers introduced new infrastructures, medicines, educational systems, cultural norms and reforms. Print technology and more rapid transportation aided the growth of nationalism and organized religion. Such developments also facilitated social reform and the transformation of regional South Asian religious traditions."

There was no unified Hindu religion at this time (arguably it does not exist now), but colonialism did have an impact on regional social reform movements within Hinduism and Islam.

**Uberoi Response:** *We find the comment "There was no unified Hindu religion at this time (arguably it does not exist now)" a misleading statement. What is the criteria for a "unified religion"? Does it mean more unified than other religions, such as Christianity with its 22,000 sects? This edit adds nothing of value.*

**36. Faculty Review proposal:** Lines 452-4: Change "They also attempted to change practices involving marriage and women's social roles to infuse Western notions of progress into the basic structures of society" to "They also attempted to reform practices involving marriage and women's social roles."

**Uberoi Response:** *This is an interesting suggestion in that it removes the "Western notions of progress" to apparently invoke some universal set of values, when in fact what was going on in colonial India was the imposition of Western values based on an assumption of racial and moral superiority. We object to this proposal.*

**37. Faculty Review proposal:** On p. 498 we recommend that the sentences, "Anti-Western violence perpetrated by the followers of a fundamentalist version of Islam has contributed to the appearance of deep conflict between the Islamic and Western worlds, especially since 9/11. Students should learn about the roots of modern Islamic extremism by reading a variety of sources from Egyptian writers and the Muslim Brotherhood, for example"

be changed to,

"Anti-Western violence has contributed to the appearance of deep conflict between the West and other parts of the world. Students should learn about the roots of modern religious extremism by reading a variety of sources from Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist nationalist texts."

The sentences imply that anti-Western violence has escalated since 9/11 when there have been ongoing attacks in Europe from the 1970s unrelated to Islamic extremism.



**Uberoi Response:** *We question the inclusion of “Hindu nationalism”—however one wants to define that term—as something that has resulted in “Anti-Western violence” and challenge the authors to produce a single example of such violence perpetrated against the West by Hindus.*